



## Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive

---

Faculty and Researcher Publications

Faculty and Researcher Publications

---

2011

# Foreword, Summer 2011: Weapons of Mass Effect; Strategic Insights; v.10, Issue 2 (September 2011)

Editors, Strategic Insights

Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School



Calhoun is a project of the Dudley Knox Library at NPS, furthering the precepts and goals of open government and government transparency. All information contained herein has been approved for release by the NPS Public Affairs Officer.

**Dudley Knox Library / Naval Postgraduate School**  
**411 Dyer Road / 1 University Circle**  
**Monterey, California USA 93943**

<http://www.nps.edu/library>

# Foreword

## Summer 2011: Weapons of Mass Effect

*Editors*

Terrorists rely on media coverage of their attacks to deliver their message to a wider audience. They often choose their victims for tactical, strategic, or symbolic reasons, but—just as often—the choice of victim matters less than the psychological impact the attack makes on society. For this reason, terrorist groups have sought the ability to execute spectacular attacks or to innovate new tactics to shock their audiences. When they succeed, they have developed a weapon of mass effect (WME). This issue of *Strategic Insights* explores the roles WME have played in recent history.

An attack or tactic can be described as having a mass effect if any of the following are true:

- The number of people killed is over one hundred.
- The attack devastated a large area—a square mile of a city or ten square miles in rural areas.
- The attack damaged or destroyed a critical facility, such as a power plant, a major airport, or an important government office.
- The attack disrupted everyday services enough to cause a significant reduction in quality of life.
- The attack caused significant economic losses to the target (eg, \$10 billion for the United States, less for developing nations).
- The attack provokes a manifests “degree of terrorism”—a subjective but nonetheless present psychological or emotional impact on the population.

In this issue, we consider one terrorist attack often credited with bringing down an authoritarian regime, as presented by José A. Olmeda in “ETA Before and After the Carrero Assassination,” and a terrorist campaign that specifically sought to develop shocking tactics, discussed in Yoram Schweitzer’s “Innovation in Terrorist Organizations: The Case of PFLP and its Offshoots.” We also examine a US policy in Afghanistan that could be considered a WME by the people of Afghanistan, with Stephen Wrage’s “Norms for Assassination by Remotely Piloted Vehicle.”

- In “ETA Before and After the Carrero Assassination,” José A. Olmeda, professor of political science at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, examines the development of the Basque nationalist terrorist group *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA). In 1973 ETA earned the distinction of being the only terrorist group to successfully assassinate a Western head of state in the post-World War II era. The death of Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, the first and only prime minister under Francisco Franco, is widely credited with collapsing the authoritarian regime and beginning the Spanish transition to democracy. ETA’s ability to successfully plan and execute an attack against a high-ranking official is a result not only of its history of innovation (which continues even today), but also of mistakes made by Spanish law enforcement. Despite the profound psychological impact the attack made on the Spanish public, ETA was unable to leverage its success into a major role in the democratic transition, nor did it secure any of its long-held goals. This failure reflects problems with the way ETA is organized.
- In “Innovation in Terrorist Organizations: The Case of PFLP and its Offshoots,” Yoram Schweitzer examines the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and how it

developed the tactic of hijacking commercial airliners in an effort to bring international attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After a failed guerrilla campaign in the 1960's, the PFLP specifically pursued "spectacular, one-off operations" in order to attract world media attention. PFLP's Marxist-Leninist ideology led it to expand its target selection to Western airlines in general, and to cooperate with non-Palestinian terrorist groups, such as the Baader-Meinhoff group, the Japanese Red Army, and ETA. Other terrorist groups copied PFLP's methods as a result. PFLP co-founder Waddia Haddad led a special unit that specialized in creative tactics for carrying out airliner attacks. The case study of the PFLP suggests features that terrorist organizations must have in order to develop the innovative tactics and strategies necessary to achieve mass effects.

- In "Norms for Assassination by Remotely Piloted Vehicle," Stephen Wrage of the US Naval Academy looks at the issue from a different angle: a government's decision to use WME when pursuing its own security—specifically, the United States' use of drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Though each drone attack is a small-scale operation on its own, the overall drone campaign has had a profound collective impact on the local population. Wrage examines the history of American norms regarding assassinations and the use of air power, particularly how such norms change depending on our capabilities and our perception of necessity. The United States has two drone campaigns, one run by the military and the other by the CIA, embodying two different interpretations of American norms. As the US disengages from the region, it will have a unique opportunity to assess the relative effectiveness of these two programs and their normative implications.

In addition to our WME papers, we have an article by Sabina Khan, a graduate of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, examining how the political status of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) leads to political instability and poor development. Today, the Pakistani government still uses policies in FATA that were originally set by the British colonial government. Khan argues that addressing FATA's problems requires a modern system of governance that comes with full provincial status. Her research is based on her life in South Waziristan as well as her recent travels in FATA, including interviews with local residents, soldiers, and the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This issue also introduces a new feature: Point/Counterpoint. Three graduate students from the Naval Postgraduate School debate whether the death of Osama bin Laden has made the United States safer from terrorism. We hope our readers will find it a thought-provoking exchange and look forward to more debates in future issues.